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A POETICAL

EPISTLE

TO

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, KNT.

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AND

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

YOU *BUT* PRESERVE A *FORM.* POPE.

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS ſeems to be a *Portrait-painting* Age! From what cauſe the preſent univerſal employment of the Artiſt in this line of Painting proceeds, it is not my immediate deſign to enquire. It may be Faſhion; it may be the increaſe of Sentiment, which ſome ſuppoſe to have now attained its utmoſt refinement; it may be that ſpirit of Luxury which pervades all ranks and profeſſions of men; or it may be an union of them all.

In former times, Families of Diſtinction and Fortune alone employed the Painter in this line of the Profeſſion. But in theſe days, the Parlour of the Tradeſman is not conſidered as a furniſhed room, if the Family-Pictures do not adorn the wainſcot: And many a good Woman, whoſe arms are marked with an eternal red, from the induſtry of leſs proſperous days, conſiders the Bracelet, with the Miniature-Painting, as an ornament neceſſary to her Station in Life. But, perhaps, the inge-

nuity of the Artiſts themſelves has been a very co-operating cauſe in diffuſing this branch of Painting to ſo wide an extent, as it at preſent occupies.

Portraits, unleſs they were produced by the Pencil of a very eminent Maſter, have, from the inſipid and unintereſting ſtyle in which they were generally painted, been conſidered as mere Traſh and Lumber by all who were ignorant of the Originals. But, by the Genius of many modern Profeſſors of Eminence, that Inſipidity is vaniſhed; and, by their Hands, a Portrait is now intereſting even to the Stranger, and, where its colours are of a laſting nature, will be intereſting to future Ages.

This Addition of Character, whether Hiſtorical, Allegorical, Domeſtic, or Profeſſional, calls forth new ſentiments to the Picture; for by ſeeing Perſons repreſented with an appearance ſuited to them, or in employments natural to their ſituation, our ideas are multiplied, and branch forth into a pleaſing variety, which a repreſentation of a formal Figure, however ſtrong the reſemblance may be, can never afford.

It is a melancholy ſuppoſition, that the Portraits of our Friends and ourſelves may, in a few years, help to compoſe the neglected Lumber of a Broker's Shop, be em-

ployed

ployed to hide the patches in a Wall, or enliven the dirty wainſcot of ſome paltry Inn. But it muſt now be owing to great Neglect, or want of Judgment, if every cauſe of ſuch an apprehenſion is not removed. This intereſting Caſt of Character gives, to the well-painted Portrait, a right to demand a place in the Collection of thoſe who are not only ignorant of the Original, but are careleſs about it. The Pictures of FAITH and HOPE, by Mr. Weſt, if they ſhould be characteriſtic Portraits, will maintain a very reſpectable place in the Gallery of the Man of Taſte, when the Fair-ones, for whom they were deſigned, have long loſt thoſe Paſſions in the enjoyment of that Happineſs which was the Object of them.

But of the different ſources of Character to which Painters apply to give animation and conſequence to their Pictures, Domeſtic and Profeſſional Life ſeems to be the moſt proper, becauſe it is the moſt natural and beſt underſtood. Some of *Zoffanij*'s Family Scenes are delightful; and, in the higher ſtyle of Family Portraiture, what an auguſt ſcene is diſplayed in *Vandyke*'s Picture of the *Pembroke* Family at *Wilton!* No hiſtoric or allegorical alluſion could add to the ſplendor which attracts the Eye, and the intereſt it finds in the Heart of every Beholder of Taſte and Sentiment.

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SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, KNT.

"PAINTER, vain's thy utmoſt art
" To draw the Idol of my Heart!
" Thy Canvaſs never can receive
" The varied charms her Features give.
" When grave, ſhe wears the awful grace
" That's ſeen in regal JUNO's face;

" When

" When on her cheeks the ſmiles appear,
" 'Tis VENUS' better ſelf is there;
" And when ſhe looks with ſtudious eye,
" Another PALLAS we deſcry.

" Painter, thy Pencil well may trace
" A JUNO's awful, heavenly grace;
" Upon your Canvaſs may be ſeen
" Chaſte Beauty's fair, imperial Queen;
" E'en Wiſdom's Goddeſs may appear
" In all her native ſplendor there.
" But in my breaſt alone can be
" The perfect Image of the Three."

Thus did the Muſe the Art defy:
Thy Pencil, eager to reply,
Daſh'd on the cloth in colours warm
The ſemblance of MARIA's Form;
And ſoon I ſaw her cheeks diſcloſe
The lilly mingled with the roſe;
And ſoon her beaming eyes diſpenſe
The ſoften'd rays of manly ſenſe:

Her

Her graceful form, her auburn hair,
All, all thy magic power declare.
Looſe flow'd her robe upon the ground,
And many a Cupid flutter'd round.
The bending branches kindly ſpread
Their verdant beauties o'er her head,
And far beyond the hills ariſe,
And ſeem to mingle with the ſkies.
At length, in all your art array'd,
The Canvaſs' ſpreading form diſplay'd
The beauties of my charming Maid.
You ſhew'd the Piece—I ſaw your pride,
And thus the wayward Muſe reply'd:

" Ah happy Canvaſs, that doſt bear
" The features of my lovely Fair!
" Upon thy ſurface, mild and clear,
" I ſee my heavenly Maid appear,
" With all the glories of her Face,
" Her winning ſmiles, and gentle grace.
" —But where's the virtue of her Mind,
" Which makes her of angelic kind?

" Where

" Where is the ſoftneſs of her Heart,
" To pity prone, and void of art?
" Theſe cannot on thy boſom ſhine—
" They're only to be found in mine."

Thus, Sir, the Muſe purſued her ſong,
Nor did ſhe mean to do you wrong!
The ſplendid gifts that partial Art,
By Genius aided, does impart,
She knows are thine—Thy talents bear
The marks of their united care.
But frolic Nature will outdo
The works of Art and Genius too:
Her cunning patterns render vain
The Painter's toil, the Sculptor's pain.
All of my Fair that Art could give,
Did on the gloſſy Canvaſs live.

With joy the Picture home I bore,
And, ſmiling, view'd it o'er and o'er!
And, when MARIA was away,
Gaz'd on it all the live-long day;

And hop'd that there her cheeks would bloom
In all their glow for years to come.

Oft did the tear bedew my eye,
To think that if my Love ſhould die,
My every joy and every care
Of future Life would center there.
But as I thus enraptur'd ſtand
Before the wonders of your hand,
I ſee the lively tints decay,
The vivid colours melt away;
And ere twelve fleeting months were o'er,
The lovely Charmer bluſh'd no more.
Her features ſunk, her roſes loſt,
MARIA ſtood a pallid Ghoſt:
Her looks were haggard, and her eyes
Now ſtarted forth with wild ſurpriſe;
And where their luſtre ſhould appear,
The faded tints had form'd a tear.
The ſpreading branches loſe their green,
The azure ſky no more is ſeen,

And the far mountain's diſtant blue
Is clouded with a ſable hue.
Upon my ſight the colours fade;
No more I ſee my heavenly Maid;
Her form is mingled with the ſhade,
And ſeems, in one eternal moan,
To weep like NIOBE—in ſtone.

MARIA now, in Country Hall,
Adorns the rude, old-faſhion'd wall,
And holds her venerable place
'Mid Dames and Lords of antient race.
At her the wond'ring Ruſtics ſtare,
As at the oldeſt Picture there:
Nor will the curious Crowd believe
That 'tis my Lady now alive.
But when the *Metzotinto*'s ſhewn,
They all a ſtrong reſemblance own.

Unhappy Artiſt, to ſurvive
The means by which your fame ſhould live!

And on the *Scraper's* * art rely
For hopes of Immortality.

Your Pencil ſummon'd into life,
For GARRICK's choice, the ardent ſtrife.
I ſaw the ſad, but ſtately Queen
That ſtalks amid the tragic ſcene:
Around her floats the purple Stole;
The Dagget and the fatal Bowl
Are not unſeen—and to the Sky
Her finger guides th' attentive eye.
'Tis vain:——Her mad-cap Rival's leer,
With roguiſh look and playful ſneer,
From Madam *Grave-Airs* wins the field,
And ROSCIUS yields---where all would yield.
Who would not to the covert fly
With *all-enchanting Comedy?*

* It may not, perhaps, be impertinent to obſerve, that this title is applied to that ſpecies of engravers, who prepare the plates for *Metzotinto* impreſſions.

But

But now I'm told, and fear it true,
That *Garrick*'s face is black and blue---
As if he'd run the riſk of life
From jealouſies of either Wife;
While the fair Dames in this agree,
To be as black and blue as he.
——Time joys to ſee the haſty ruin,
That coſt ſo little in undoing.
Full many an age he muſt employ
The works of *Raphael* to deſtroy;
And *Titian*'s tints his power defy
Through many a rolling century:
And e'en where Time has aim'd the blow,
Art hath withſtood the biting Foe.
But years or months, at his command,
Efface the labours of your hand;
Nor, when they fade, can you reſtore
The work to what it was before:
Your utmoſt genius cannot give
Health to the Form, and bid it live.

I ſaw your daring Pencil trace
The manly lines of AMHERST's face;
And as I ſtood, my wond'ring eyes
Beheld th' heroic Form ariſe.
A deep and ſolemn look he wore,
As if attentive to explore
Some dark deſign of *Britain*'s Foe,
How to prevent th' approaching blow;
To ſtop the Fury in its courſe,
Or hurl it back with triple force;
Or, what in truth ſo far exceeds
The higheſt fame of warlike deeds,
Humanely thoughtful how to ſave
The ſtarving thouſands from the grave *.
Upon his mild, but dauntleſs breaſt,
In its pale ſplendor was expreſt
The luſtre of the ſilver Star,
Well earn'd amid the toils of War.

* I ſhall not, by relating the whole of the tranſaction to which I allude, ſuppoſe any one ignorant of that ſplendid Act of Humanity which, during the laſt war in *Canada*, reflected ſo much honour upon *Lord Amherſt*, and, through him, upon his Country and his nature.

At length, the final tint beſtow'd,
The finiſh'd Portrait nobly glow'd
In colours warm, and touches true,
As *Titian*'s Pencil ever drew.

And muſt the fair reſemblance fade,
Ere the great Hero's ſelf is laid
Beneath the marble that will bear
The Tribute of *Britannia*'s Tear?
And when the ſage, Hiſtoric pen
Shall rank him 'mong the firſt of Men?
Forbid it, Art! But thou ſhould'ſt give
The glowing oil to look and live;
And while his future Offſpring read
Of many a brave, heroic deed;
Of battles won, of trophies rear'd,
Of nations by his mercy ſpar'd;
Muſt their young eyes, in vain, deſire
To ſee the likeneſs of their Sire,
Who Britiſh bands to triumph led,
And trod the paths they wiſh to tread?

Muſt they, in vain, the Canvaſs trace
To catch the generous, gentle Grace
That o'er the vet'ran features ran,
And mark'd the Hero and the Man?
While many a curſe their lips impart,
To damn Thee and thy fleeting Art!

Lo! INFANT JOVE prepares to throw
His lightnings on the world below;
But ſoon the heavenly flame expires,
Chang'd to blue *Tartarean* fires,
That ſtench OLYMPUS' high abode,
And threat to ſuffocate the GOD.

REYNOLDS! I'm not to cenſure prone;
Your genius I moſt gladly own;
And wiſh that genius might ſecure
A name, that would as long endure,
As thoſe high honours which proclaim
Immortal RAPHAEL's endleſs fame.
For ſuch a fame purſue the toil,
And fix it deep in ſolid oil.

To Painting's higheſt efforts climb,
Nor fear thy fate, and laugh at Time:
In works of laſting form engage,
And be the RAPHAEL of the Age.

Proceed, great Painter! nor refuſe
Your ſubjects from the friendly Muſe:
Nor can ſhe call from ancient Fame
Men of a more exalted name,
Than ſome whom our *Britannia* owns
Among her favourite, darling Sons.
Nor e'er did gentle Beauty move
To higher joys of virtuous Love,
Than many a Fair whoſe charms inſpire
The Britiſh Youth with chaſte deſire.
——And SATIRE too demands thy aid.——
To make the vicious Great afraid,
To pale the glowing tints of Pride,
To urge Contrition's flowing tide,
To paint the lives of ſhameleſs Men,
She to thy Pencil yields the Pen.

Come,

Come, then, th' expecting cloth prepare!
Let GARRICK's ſelf be painted there!
Not as, erewhile, in wayward mood,
Doubtful the mighty Actor ſtood,
And hardly knew which Dame to chuſe,
The *Tragic* or the *Comic* Muſe.
In SHAKESPEARE's Temple let him ſtand,
Erected by his grateful hand,
And let *Parnaſſian* Fingers ſhower
Each verdant leaf and fragrant flower;
And may the Laurel's green array
The ſame conducting Hands obey
To form a bower, where his age
May, from the turmoils of the Stage,
Enjoy that calm, ſedate repoſe
Which conſcious Merit only knows.
Above, may full-wing'd *Fame* be ſeen,
With patient but exulting mien;
And let her pluck a verdant ſpray
From *Shakeſpeare*'s never-fading Bay;
And let a *Muſe* the gift receive,
And into form the Garland weave,

And place it on the favour'd Brow
Where SHAKESPEARE would the palm beſtow.

Beneath let Serpent Flatt'ry lour,
Bedeck'd with many a fading flower;
And let her pois'nous train appear,
To writhe in foul contortion there.

Again th' unfading tints prepare!
Great Painter! ply thy utmoſt care!
To ev'ry touch attention give:
Let BURKE upon the canvaſs live!
Let him with ſolemn grace appear
Before the Senate's awful Chair,
As if preparing to diſpenſe
That flood of rapid eloquence,
Which now with wond'rous ſweetneſs charms,
Now by its nervous force alarms;
And, with a more than Wizard's art,
Commands the pulſes of the heart.
Let Emblems of exalted Senſe,
Of Genius, Wit, and Eloquence,

Of cunning Art's collected ſtore,
Of Erudition's hidden lore,
With careleſs grace, be ſcatter'd round,
And, where he ſtands, beſtrew the ground.
But 'mid th' ineſtimable heap
Let PARTY-RAGE be laid aſleep!

Now on the Canvaſs be diſplay'd
The figure of a weeping Maid!
Paint her thin cheeks of pallid hue;
With flooding tears thoſe cheeks bedew;
And turn her humble, ſtreaming eye
To the ſoft mercies of the Sky.
Upon her arm, with haggard mien,
Let F——x's tawny figure lean;
And, in his face, pourtray the ſmart
Which Conſcience laſhes on his heart.
Before them paint the bright abodes
Of Virtue and her kindred Gods:
Let HOPE beſide the portal ſtand,
The Anchor in her beck'ning hand.

And kindly bid the ſorrowing Pair
To urge their ſteps, and enter there *.

Your hand an harder taſk muſt try,
And change the Vet'ran to the Boy!
No more let T— —D's form appear
With martial grace and hoary hair!
Let criſped curls his brow bedeck,
And hang in ringlets on his neck;

* While I was amuſing myſelf with this Compoſition, I was aſked who the Lady of Faſhion might be, whom I had join'd with Mr. F—— in this penitential progreſs? It may therefore be proper, for the ſatisfaction of enquirers, to ſay ſomething concerning her.

She is not a Lady of Faſhion, for ſhe ſeldom appears in public; and when ſhe does, no one of the Ton will own an acquaintance with her. She is of a very ancient family and high birth, and all the Monarchs in Europe, with their Miniſters, Favourites, &c. acknowledge her in their cloſets. And I ſhould be glad, for I am myſelf well acquainted with her ſalutary influence, to recommend her to the immediate intimacy of our Young Men and Women of Faſhion---that ſhe might be ſaved the diſagreeable neceſſity of intruding herſelf upon them at ſome future period of their lives.--- The Lady's name is Repentance.

Such

Such as around the fingers twin'd
Of panting VENUS, when reclin'd
Upon her breaſt ADONIS lay,
And heav'nly raptures bleſs'd the day!
Paint on his cheek Health's crimſon glow,
Let whiteneſs clad his youthful brow,
And give him ev'ry charm beſide
Expected by a blooming Bride!

But if your Pencil ſhould refuſe
The arduous taſk; my forward Muſe
An eaſy ſubject will propoſe.
Time, Sir, and you have long been foes:
For once, then, take the lead of Time,
And wrinkle T— —D in her prime.
For ſince you cannot bring his years
Back to the ſtrength and youth of hers,
Your hand to fitneſs muſt accord,
And make her aged as her Lord.
The wrinkles on her face diſplay,
And turn her floating treſſes grey.

And give her ſuch a form and dreſs
As ſhe at fifty will poſſeſs;
Such as your Pencil would have given
To F——RS, now a Saint in Heaven.
In nuptial ties this truth I hold:
Both ſhould be Young, or both be Old!

Again I urge the Pencil's power:
Come, trace the lone monaſtic Tower,
Whoſe walls, with ivy overgrown,
Echo the ſad repentant moan
Of ſinful ſouls, who glad repair
To ſhed their daily ſorrows there;
And in a Turret place the Bell
That from the dark and dreary Cell,
At midnight hour, breaks off the ſleep
Of thoſe who only wake to weep.
Beneath the wall's dark umbrage place,
Repentance mark'd upon her face,
Some aged and repentant Dame,
That doth the heav'nly mercies claim.

Let

Let her before His Image bend,
Who died to be the Sinner's Friend;
And hang the Croſs adown her ſide,
Emblem of that whereon He died.
Make her eyes ſhed the dropping tear,
As tho' ſhe urg'd a doubtful prayer;
And give to the repentant Nun
The wrinkled form of H--- ---TON.

Thus, thus, my Friend, exert your art,
And pleaſe the Eye, and mend the Heart!
Uncrimſon A--- ---R's gawdy face,
But leave her all her *ſhare of Grace.*
To M——LB—— give her Father's ſpirit,
And D--- ---R all her Mother's merit.
Make C--- ---N ſober, P--- --- refin'd,
And B--- --- gen'rous, brave and kind.
Let them their better Natures ſee,
And paint them what they ought to be.

Already youthful BEDFORD's ſword,
Urg'd by the valour of its Lord,

Gives,

Gives, to a Dragon's form, the wound
That lays the Monſter on the ground *.
——So may he in his future Age
Quell Paſſion's unrelenting rage;
Or, by his ſweetneſs, ſoothe to reſt
The Tyrants of the Human Breaſt.

Then be yourſelf! nor blend your fame
With Artiſts of inferior name.
Do not your moral Works expoſe
At *Royal-Academic* Shows;
But thus hold forth, to mend the Town,
An Exhibition all your own!

* A Picture, painted by Sir Joſhua Reynolds, in the preſent Exhibition.

FINIS.